

## John Stableford born 1839, by his son, Samuel.

When they came to live at Huncote a new circuit of village chapels was open to John's activities in preaching, including Enderby, 3 miles distant.

At this time [1870s] Enderby society was at a very low ebb. In the years preceding it had declined to a membership of about a dozen, and the minister, the Rev. W. Whitby, proposed to close the chapel since, as he reported to the quarterly meeting, "Enderby doesn't pay my shoe leather."

It had gained the sobriquet "Poor Enderby". In addition, it had no Sunday School. That institution had died years before.

John's personal appeal was made to the meeting. "Don't close it down yet, give me a chance to revive it."

His appeal was successful; they gave him - and Enderby - the chance he had asked for.

By this time John had been appointed Superintendent of Huncote Sunday School and his first venture for Enderby was to take the Huncote Sunday School over to Enderby, (*the children and teachers walking over the fields*) on a beautiful June day in 1879, where they repeated their own anniversary hymns. It was a Sunday School Sermons Day in a Chapel which did not itself possess a Sunday school. The innovation was a great success, the chapel was filled, it caught the imagination of the villagers and the venture was repeated the following year.

Meanwhile, in 1880, John had obtained employment at Enderby quarry which was, again, a newly-opened one, but for a time he could not remove there owing to housing shortage.

During this time on one or two nights each week he would leave his work at the quarry, repair to the house of a kindly disposed man - Robert Carter - change from his working clothes to his "second best" and sally forth on a visiting expedition, calling on all and sundry to invite them to come to Chapel, returning home late a tired but happy man. In this way he did valiant service, enlisting interest, making converts, and rallying the feeble older members to new ambitions. After several months he obtained possession of an empty cottage in Gumley Square, Enderby, removed the family and entered on what was to become the final phase of his life.

In his zeal for the prosperity of this old cause he laboured night and day, using all the artifices he knew and enlisting the interest of many of his friends. The term "poor Enderby" became an obsolete one for, in a year or two, the Society flourished beyond an expectation until the congregation attending the services overflowed the capacity of the Chapel and, in the year 1888, (eight years after John's removal to Enderby) a new Chapel was built adjoining the old one which was, from then onwards, used as a Sunday School for one of his earliest ventures was the establishment of a new Sunday School, the first scholars of which included Harry and myself. As the Church membership increased and prospered, so did the Sunday School until the young men's and young women's classes overflowed to the newly-built vestries and still left the old Chapel filled with scholars.

All these efforts of John's were ably and devotedly seconded by Zillah, his wife, who proudly approved of his untiring labours for the good of the church, and was, herself, in labours abundant. She saw the need of some staid and mature woman to lead the Young Women's Class in the Sunday School. So, for many years, while John led the lads, Zillah led the girls and became, to many, their "Spiritual Mother". Zillah had an ingrained and well-founded belief which she liked often to put into words: "Look after the lads, and bring them in, and the girls will follow."

There was, and is now, one other Non-Conformist Church at Enderby, the Independent Baptists. Their premises (*Chapel and school room*) are built on the crown of the rather steep hilly street, while the "Primitive" Chapel is lower down the village. This peculiarity led to the use of the terms by the villagers when referring to either of them as "the top chapel" and "the bottom chapel".

These derivations may have originally been used quite innocently and without any unworthy reflection but when John and Zillah settled in Enderby the term "top chapel" used by the adherents of the Independents carried with it a flavour of superiority, and they "looked down" on the members of the "bottom chapel" with probably some excuse, for Primitive Methodists not only attended the "bottom" chapel but were also somewhat lower in the social scale.

They all tried the Church of England, but its rites and ceremonies were unpalatable to them; they had been born and bred Non-Conformists. They tried the Baptist Church at Narborough, 2 miles away. They could not continue to walk that distance regularly. So, in the end, they gravitated to the "bottom chapel".

This coincided with the time when John and Zillah and the new personnel of the Primitives, were really succeeding in living down the opprobrium "bottom chapel" and the influx of Independents gave them great encouragement.

From that time on the Church never looked back. John and Zillah had new friends in the Society, new helpers and these amongst the best and most highly respected families in the village and in time the opprobrious terms "top" and "bottom" disappeared from common use. Some of these newcomers after a short period of years returned to their old Church, but notably the Langton family, the Gamble family and the two Burgess families, William and Robert, remained and in all things supported John and Zillah in this, their life's principal work.

This circumstance is made notable here by the fact that Robert and Elizabeth Ann Burgess had two daughters, Anne and Violetta. John and Zillah had two sons, Harry (Charles Henry) and Sam (*for short*) who later on became united, each son taking one of the sisters to wife.

That was a great day in John and Zillah's life when the foundation stones were laid for the new chapel. John laid one of the stones for himself and Zillah, while Harry and Sam laid a brick, on each of which was cut their initials and each contributed his donation for the privilege of taking part in that memorable service. I recall that my donation was one guinea - a big amount for a youth in those days and I think Harry's was either one or two guineas. Many prominent ministers and laymen took part on that auspicious day.

But, if possible, a greater time was that when the Chapel was officially opened for public worship. While the stone-laying was restricted to one day, the opening services were spread over 3 or 4 weeks. Special preachers each Sunday were appointed and the whole time given

over to thanksgiving and rejoicing for the great wonder that had been wrought in those few years of consistent labour and faithful service by John and Zillah who had transformed the Society, lifted it from the opprobrium of "Poor Enderby" and "the bottom Chapel" by the Grace of God and their own united efforts to a position of dignity and prosperity in the connection.

The greatest day of their later years was, I think, that of their golden wedding.

As their two sons, their wives and children gathered round them on that fine sunny 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1911, they felt this was the most wonderful and happiest day of their lives. The years of struggle to gain a modest competence for their old age were past. They were now living in a sort of "Beulah Land" where everything and everybody exuded smiles.

Harry, who had become something of an expert in photography, set up his camera at the rear of the house and arranged for a neighbour to release the shutter, while John and Zillah (*she resplendent in her mob cap*) sat surrounded by their family. Everyone was proud of the occasion and, indeed, it was a worthy record of the crowning happiness of a long and worthy life they had spent in each other's company.



Taken at King Street, Enderby, Leicester on 10th July, 1911  
John & Zillahs' Golden Wedding Day

1. Hilda Stableford (Mrs. Page). 2. Charles Henry Stableford. 3. Grace Ruth Stableford (Mrs. Parkinson). 4. Charles Henry Stableford.  
5. Annie Stableford (nee Burgess). 6. John Stableford. 7. Zillah Stableford (nee Sawbridge). 8. Violetta Stableford (nee Burgess).  
9. Samuel John Sawbridge Stableford. 10. John Robert Stableford. 11. Samuel Horace Stableford. 12. Ronald Cecil Stableford.

John and Zillah lived to a ripe old age, loved and revered by all who knew them.

John retired from the laborious quarry work at about 65, to live in comparative comfort, as they had planned so many years before, their aims accomplished, their life's work well done, independent of parish assistance, which they utterly abhorred, independent of help from their children, but in characteristic simplicity, and John then spent his remaining years looking after and helping "Mother" or "Bob" (*as he had alternatively and affectionately called her*) in

her now-increasing infirmities till she passed to the Homeland on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1914, in her 80<sup>th</sup> year.

I (*Sam*) was with her a couple of hours before her passing, and she said to me: "Sam, pray with me" and, (*as in the days of my boy-hood*) I knelt by her knee to ask God's Blessing on her - one of the greatest of God's saints on earth.

John lived nearly four years longer to the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1918, (*four years of great loneliness since he had lost "Bob"*) when, in his 79<sup>th</sup> year, he joined her who had been his guiding helpmate through the long years of struggle, though happy and blessed companionship of life. They were noble and great souls.

On the Communion Table in the Church they served so long and so faithfully there stands a flower vase on which is inscribed the words:

"They live before us as the image of that unto which we are to grow forever"

Also, a stone tablet, designed by Harry, is fixed on the wall to their joint memory.